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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000007

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FAIR](#) [EI](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: EXPLOSIVES BLUNDER REVERBERATES; FACTS REMAINS MURKY

CLASSIFIED BY: Susan Ball, Charge d'Affaires, a.i., State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)
¶1. (U) Summary. As much of the world now knows, a January 2 airport security exercise in Poprad, Slovakia, went terribly awry. Slovak police had placed a 100-gram sample of RDX explosives in the bag of a Slovak citizen traveling to his residence in Dublin to test detection capabilities. Apparently the explosives made their way into the aircraft undetected, and while answers to questions of who knew what, when, are still in dispute, what followed next -- the cordoning off of the man's neighborhood and his brief arrest on terrorism charges, the retrieval of the explosive material a full three days after it entered Ireland, the very public anger of the Irish Government and political opposition and calls for Interior Minister Kalinak's resignation -- is not in doubt. The longer-term effects of the episode on the Fico Government's credibility inside and outside of Slovakia, as well as on Kalinak's career, is harder to ascertain. End Summary.

What We Know

¶2. (U) We became aware of the incident early on January 6 through the BBC website, after which the story was picked up by local electronic media. The bulk of what we believe we know is summarized above. In addition, the Interior Minister has accepted the resignation of the head of the Alien and Border Police, Tibor Mako. The unnamed police officer who placed the explosives in the bag will be subject to disciplinary proceedings. In Kalinak's fiery January 7 press conference, his first public comments on the matter (a full five days after the incident occurred), he attributed the incident to a "stupid, human, mistake." During the intervening days, according to his spokesman, Kalinak suspended the practice that led to the event. Key opposition leaders are calling for Kalinak's resignation. SDKU MP Lucia Zitnanska (Kalinak's former law professor) stated on January 8 that Kalinak has proven that "he hasn't the most elementary idea about political culture, nor is he capable of managing his ministry."

What We Don't Know

¶3. (C) Pending a requested meeting with the Irish Ambassador, our information comes from the press and the government's limited, and sometimes conflicting, statements. Among key points that remain unclear: When did the Slovaks first notify Irish authorities? When did the Minister Kalinak learn of the incident? How long have Slovak police engaged in this practice? Kalinak says such tests have been carried out for years, i.e., also under the previous government. Michal Borgula, who served as deputy Chief of the Border Police from 1999-2003, and then Chief from 2004-7, denies this. Press accounts differ as to how Irish law enforcement will follow up

in the case, with some outlets reporting that a police team will visit Slovakia. Finally, and perhaps most important: according to Slovak law, was the police action involving an unwitting civilian a violation of Slovak law? Ivan Bacik (please protect) currently serving in the MOI's Office of International Police Cooperation, told Emboff that this act was patently illegal, and that, to his knowledge, it had not taken place under the current government. A respected Slovak criminal lawyer, Lucia Kurilovska, also has stated publicly that the act was not only illegal, but likely criminal. No Slovak official, including Kalinak, has been able to specify under which law the actions could have been permitted.

The Government's Response

¶4. (U) In an uncharacteristically (for Robert Kalinak) angry and accusatory press conference on January 7, Kalinak added little to the known facts about the incident. He studiously avoided reference to the RDX as an explosive, but called it instead a 'pyrotechnic sample.' Kalinak's description is misleading at best: RDX is a Class A military high explosive. Curiously, he also stated that the material had been placed 'among' -- not 'in' -- the baggage. Kalinak spent the bulk of the time lashing out against critics in the opposition and his predecessors at the ministry for their election year "lies" and efforts to smear the entire police force for the "simple human error" of one individual. Kalinak claimed that the practice of testing airport security by placing explosives material in the bags of unwitting passengers had gone on since 1989. Thus, if it was an illegal act, then police under his predecessors had also acted illegally. When a reporter challenged Kalinak,

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stating that she had information that the practice of placing test explosives in the baggage of unwitting passengers had, in fact, begun in 2007, he replied that he had different information, and that all would be made clear in full report. In response to a comment by a Czech law enforcement official that no such thing could happen in the Czech Republic, now deposed Border Police Chief Mako responded tartly: 'They lie.'

¶5. (C) Minister Kalinak then met his critics head on with a defense of some of the most notorious police failures of his tenure. In an extended rant, Kalinak defended controversial actions -- or inactions -- by MOI on the Hedviga Malinova case, the dawn raid at the Franciscan monastery, and the failure to gain a conviction in the 2005 murder of student Daniel Tupy. Comment: Kalinak's statements contained elements of truth, but what he didn't acknowledge about the unethical and unprofessional handling by him and/or his subordinates of each of these cases -- and there are several more which merit mention -- is much more significant. End Comment. For their part, PM Fico and President Gasparovic have maintained public silence on the incident. A statement by the MFA spokesman indicated merely that FM Lajcak has spoken to his Irish counterpart about the matter.

Slovaks Incredulous at Media Coverage

¶6. (U) Perhaps the single most common feature of both discussion among Slovaks and all media coverage is how this story is playing around the world. Today's Sme features headlines from BBC, CCN, Le Monde, WJS, Al-Jazeera, etc. Google searches on the story yield over 1,000 articles and over 5,000 Twitters. That anything that happens in Slovakia could resonate so outside the country seems to have utterly flummoxed the Slovaks. At the same time, true to their reputation, the incident is being referred to as a 'worldwide shame' for the

nation. The most popular blog in Slovakia, SME online, features a running public debate on the issue with over 30,000 posts so far.

What's Next

¶8. (U) We will see whether the deep embarrassment over the incident gives way to more than relatively low level resignations and disciplinary actions. Given the many discrepancies in the way Irish and Slovak sources - including official ones - describe various aspects of the events, not to mention the charges and countercharges here in Slovakia about the practice - we expect this scandal will not blow over quickly. The opposition SDKU party had stated earlier this week that while Kalinak should resign, the opposition did not intend to launch a recall effort just months before the elections. Following Kalinak's press conference, however, SDKU appears to be reconsidering and, according to Zitnanska, will decide next week.

¶9. (C) As is often the case, Kalinak's fate will hinge not on any action by the opposition, but on the duration and intensity of international (in this case, European) opprobrium and on PM Fico's judgment of public opinion. If Kalinak's bold rejection of responsibility backfires with the Slovak electorate, or if it is revealed that he has misled either the public or his Irish counterparts, it is more than possible that the heir apparent might have to step down from his Ministerial post. That does not mean that Kalinak would disappear from Smer's top ranks, however. For now, the Fico government will concentrate on getting through one of the biggest PR imbroglios that it has ever faced.

BALL